

WHY WAS TWA FLIGHT #847 HIJACKED?

TIMING

Although barring hard intelligence it was impossible to ascertain precisely what type of American target would be attacked, the sponsorship by radical countries of some spectacular act being launched now against U.S. interests in the Middle East, was highly predictable. This in light of the following factors:

Strategic consideration:

There has been a marked intensification of anti-American activities sponsored by Libya, Syria and Iran in recent months. This because of the shared perception that Washington has concocted a "new imperialist conspiracy" for the area. Accordingly, elements of this conspiracy include:

1. The rapprochement between Egypt and Iraq and between Egypt and Jordan.
2. The resumption of U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations and the trips to Washington undertaken recently by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, Egypt's President Mubarak and Jordan's King Hussein.
3. Talks between King Hussein and Yasir Arafat on formation of a joint delegation for possible peace negotiations with Israel.

Combined these developments have confirmed in radical eyes the reality of an imperialist plot to establish an American sponsored axis in the Middle East aimed at containing and isolating their regimes. Radical states have reacted to this prospect with remarkable vehemence pledging coordinated efforts to foil this imperialist plot. Consequently, in fact, there has been a sharp escalation in radical efforts to undermine regimes friendly to America in the Middle East, as well as directly target America's presence in order to expel its influence from the region. The hijacking of the TWA plane is only the most recent in a series of such radically-motivated activities which have also included:

-Placing of bombs in Saudi Arabia (18 May)

- A Libyan/Syrian plot to blow up the U.S. embassy in Cairo (scheduled to have taken place on 22 May)
- The attempt on the life of the Amir of Kuwait (25 May)
- Attacks on Jordanian installations abroad, including reports of a wide-spread plot to overthrow the monarchy which, allegedly, forced Hussein to cut short his visit to the U.S. and cancel his trip to Spain.
- Abduction of U.S. citizens in Lebanon (29 May, 9 June)
- Reports of the uncovering of a new plot against Bahrain.

Second, it is impossible to ignore the potential beneficial effect which this act could have on rekindling of revolutionary zeal, a galvanization of sorts, inside Iran. This at a time of growing dissatisfaction with the ongoing war with Iraq, which had recently led to mass demonstrations in Tehran and other Iranian cities.

Tactical considerations:

1. Undoubtedly, the timing of the attack was influenced by the recent release by Israel of more than a thousand terrorists in exchange for 3 Israeli POWs. This swap, which interestingly enough took place with a more extreme element within the PLO (Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC), was apparently perceived as an indication of current Israeli weakness which the radicals have sought to exploit publicly. Publicizing Israel's retreat under radical pressure, is regarded as entailing promising consequences in terms of its impact on moderate Arab regimes in the Middle East.
2. The timing of the attack was also influenced by the Muslim celebration of the Ramadan, which has been marked by intensified religious instigation against the U.S. and Israel.
3. It would seem reasonable to assume that the Shi'as are also utilizing

the hijacking as an alibi against any rumors of tacit cooperation with Israel which their recent campaign against the PLO in Beirut has brought about.

MOTIVATION

There should be no confusion as to the real target of the hijacking. Whatever the results of the "negotiations" over the Shia detainees in Israel, the principal aim of the hijacking was to harm American interests at least in the Middle East. The identity of the target of this operation is revealed by the following considerations:

1. An American plane was selected for purposes of communicating the radical message.
2. An American navy man was murdered because of him representing the U.S. military.
3. The terrorists' communique spoke of "administering blows against imperialism".
4. The American media has been extensively used to drive the radical message home--the U.S. is under attack in the Middle East.

From this perspective it is safe to ascertain that radical countries hope to achieve the following results from the attack:

1. Intimidate U.S. allies by demonstrating America's inability to defend its own assets let alone its friends.
2. Force the U.S. to diminish its involvement and influence in the region, to allow further radicalization of the area.
3. Convince Middle Eastern and other audiences of the power of radicalism and revolution.
4. Derail U.S. policy by insitigating Arab-Israeli tensions, perhaps via large-scale Israeli and/or American reprisal.
5. Drive a wedge between the U.S. and Israel.

IMPLICATIONS

The main implication of the above analysis is as follows: The more is the U.S. perceived to increase its regional influence, be it via sponsoring a peace plan or establishment of military bases, the higher the probability of an intensive radical campaign designed to undermine if not uproot this influence. Thus it is foolhardy for the United States to assume that policies which are domestically viewed as contributing to peace prospects, and thus enjoy wide support, would be viewed as of lesser threat when it comes to members of the radical entente. It is a policy failure of the first order for the United States to pursue one course without at the same time take effective measures to contain, if not combat, the likely radical countermeasures. There will be no real and durable progress toward peace in the Middle East unless America simultaneously acts, even forcefully, to remove the threat of the radical entente from this and other regions.

Failure to comprehend this simple fact could be extremely costly as it will:

1. Expose regional allies collaborating with U.S. policies to acute dangers.
2. Repeated American failures to cope with the radical challenge are likely to enhance its attractiveness for the Soviet Union which is seeking to slow the U.S. down strategically and divert its resources. This process in fact has been underway for the past 18 months, as a new Soviet activist policy increasingly seeks to utilize the radical entente to undermine the U.S. position globally while building up a counter-front in Central America.